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Economic Perspective 3

INDUSTRIALISING EDUCATION

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There is universal agreement that education is facing a crisis, but the causes and solutions of the current difficulties have so far proved less susceptible to consensus. The public debate has generally focussed on the terms and conditions of employment, and the associated failure to introduce planned changes to curricula and assessment, as the keys to understanding the recent dispute and the wider problems facing education. However, this debate (like the current inquiry, given the terms of reference from the Secretary of State for Scotland), is unlikely to uncover all the underlying factors generating the current crisis.

The conduct of the disputes

In Scotland, the outcome has initially been a little more clearcut. In the face of protracted action by the EIS and other unions the SED initially adopted a hardline approach, mainly distinguished by its ineptitude. The first step, requiring local authorities to provide alternative teaching arrangements and to take disciplinary measures was an utter failure. Local Authorities, recognising that teachers can only be legally suspended on full pay, declined to implement the Minister's request. Likewise, the issue of a letter by the Minister for Industry and Education at the Scottish Office indicating that any agreement on pay and conditions would have to be based on a new and detailed job and conditions would have to be based on a new and detailed job description setting out professional and other duties relating to curricula development and reform, discipline, preparation for examinations,

utilisation of non-class hours, and links with parents, was subsequently clarified by the Secretary of State as not representing a set of preconditions for negotiation. Nevertheless, by May 1985 it was clear that the Government was prepared to withstand a long dispute.

By February 1986 little progress had been made. While COSLA had taken a 'tough' attitude towards teachers who refused to carry out administrative work on examinations, in practice they possessed only a limited ability to penalise teachers for non-compliance. The SED and the Government are far more vulnerable over the refusal of teachers to enter into contract to act as markers of examination scripts. In Scotland, as in England, the continued threat to examinations prompted Government action in the form of an interim settlement and the establishment of an independent Committee of Inquiry.

In England the dispute progressed through a series of 'final' offers without nearing any settlement that looks permanent. The recent rejigging of the trade union side of the Burnham Committee, to eliminate the absolute majority of the NUT, contributed towards a 'settlement' of sorts whereby the teaching unions, initially excluding the NUT, met ACAS with a view towards conciliation. However, such jerrymandering techniques did little to resolve either the immediate or underlying problems in the profession, hence the Government's offer of 5.5% backdated to 1 April, on account, pending the outcome of the ACAS based talks. This offer, which surprised both the trade unions and

local authority employers, also allowed the NUT to rejoin the talks. It represented an attempt by the Government to prevent the commencement of further industrial action and to restore normal working in schools.

There is no doubt that for Scottish teachers the experience of industrial action, and the apparent inability of the Government to accept a logical case, has left a very bitter taste in the mouth and one which, after the strike, has become even more bitter for some. Those teachers in areas targetted for the most consistent action, who thus bore the brunt of the dispute including strong parental criticism, and who to some extent see themselves as the earners of the pay rise, are now discovering that their backdated award has been reduced by the number of days they were on strike. In contrast, those that took no action have received undiminished lump sums. More generally, the experience of 'free home-time' has induced a reluctance to take up the previous level of 'out of school work'.

Future developments

The terms of reference of the Committee of Inquiry in Scotland are as follows:

"In the light of the Government's educational objectives and the need to observe continuing public expenditure restraint in the interests of taxpayers and ratepayers, to consider:

1. the duties, pay structures, pay levels and other conditions of service of school teachers, with particular regard to the need to recruit, retain and motivate teachers of the right quality, to address staffing difficulties in shortage areas such as mathematics and science and in particular localities, and to improve the promotion and career prospects of

effective teachers, particularly experienced teachers of proven ability who remain in the classroom;

2. teachers' duties and responsibilities and their definition in contracts of employment;
3. the arrangements for managing schools and the teaching service;
4. future arrangements for determining teachers' pay and structure, duties, responsibilities and conditions of service;
5. the mechanisms for implementing and enforcing the above arrangements;
6. in all respects the need to take account of what can be afforded;

and to make arrangements."

The most likely solution by the review panel to the problem of increasing teachers' pay, while taking into account both the non-teaching duties undertaken and the interests of rate and tax payers (ie minimising the aggregate increase in the salary bill) is to widen or increase the number of differentials within the profession. There are at least three ways of doing this, and we will possibly see a combination of all of them.

1. Extra duties - running out of school-hours activities, school trips, parental liaison, preparation and marking - could be regarded as qualifying for overtime payment either on a basic hourly rate or a lump sum basis. A consequence of this would be that all such duties would be completed at school and the volume of work performed at home would diminish.

Possibly more significant in the current era would be the criteria upon which such additional payment would be approved. If the moves to greater parental choice of schools and involvement in schools continues there is much to suggest that 'socially acceptable' activities which may not be those in the best interests of the child will secure overtime payment.

2. Subject areas in which there is a teacher shortfall - maths, physics, business studies (and, according to SED figures, religious education) - may be designated to receive additional payments, unlike the earlier system of designating schools where there was a teacher shortage. This would parallel developments elsewhere in the public sector and may well be buttressed by a new system of awarding differential rates rather than across the board increases. Within a few years such a policy could weaken the internal unity of the profession.

3. Probably the most likely option is some form of assessment-based incremental scale. During the course of both Scottish and English disputes the unions were offered new pay scales with incremental progression dependent on teacher assessment (ultimately by the head teacher). In the House of Commons in February 1985 Sir Keith Joseph re-iterated "I remain in favour of a close link between performance and pay. That would require regular appraisal of professional performance". While to those outside the profession such a proposal appears good management policy, rewarding 'good' teachers is, in practical terms, ridden with difficulties. The sheer subjectivity of such schemes based on the personal judgement of managers has, in other sectors of employment, been a ready source of grievance. Merit-based schemes are uniquely ill suited to the teaching profession because of the difficulties of establishing the criteria for merit. Superficial criteria such as the number or percentage of examination passes clearly disadvantage good teachers teaching the less able, where arguably such skills generate a greater social good. Equally, such schemes do not

distinguish as to the amount or quality of effort on the part of the teacher, and would raise major social questions by funneling resources to the able to the detriment of others. More pragmatically, it can also be questioned whether such a system is workable if overall educational budgets remain inflexible: if an authority is lucky enough to have a plentiful supply of meritorious teachers on its books, but has a fixed budget for educational spending, either some of that merit will go unrewarded, or for every merit worthy teacher who gets more the others will get proportionally less. In other words, payment for excellence (however judged) can never really be made on objective grounds but only on some kind of quota basis.

The writing on the blackboard

To understand the protracted nature of the teachers' dispute, the depths of bitterness reached, and the somewhat stormy outlook for the future, it is necessary to examine some of the underlying currents in the education service that have been growing stronger over the past two years.

Education, both north and south of the border, is having to cope simultaneously with a series of problems which are increasingly entwining to form a downward spiral. First, the decline in school rolls has contributed to a sense of increased insecurity in the profession and reduced the possibilities for promotion, fears and difficulties which have been and will continue to be exacerbated by the restrictions and limitations on local authority expenditure. Some indications of potential job losses in primary and secondary education can be gleaned from the results of pupil projections conducted by the Scottish Education Department (Statistical Bulletin Nos 2/B2/1984 and 1/B1/1985), which indicate a significant decline in the numbers of primary and secondary pupils. Between 1982 and 1987 the number of primary pupils will fall by 10% and there is a projected drop of 30% in the numbers of secondary pupils between 1982 and 1991. Such aggregated figures conceal considerable variations across

regions. In Strathclyde it is projected that primary numbers will fall by 12% by 1987, before rising to more than the 1982 level by 1996. Secondary pupil numbers are projected to fall by 36% before increasing gradually. In Grampian secondary pupil numbers are projected to fall by 15% by 1990.

The relationship between demographic trends and staffing levels has been fairly direct. For example, between 1983 and 1984 the number of primary pupils fell by 2.3% and the number of teachers by 2.5%. In the same period there was a decline of 1.5% (430) in the numbers of secondary teachers. An inevitable implication of a possible 36% drop in the numbers of teachers, plus attempts to reduce the percentage above basic staff complements, will be significant job reductions and closures of schools. Dealing with the increasing surplus of staff will shortly become an important policy issue leading to an expansion of compulsory transfers, retraining schemes, and voluntary severance schemes. The age profile of the profession indicates only limited scope for early retirement. Moreover, the pressures to make education more cost effective will result in an increasing demand for teachers able to teach in a range of subjects, generalists rather than specialists, and to the reduction of the range of subjects offered in any one school (this would suggest an extension of the current consortia arrangements).

Table 1 Age distribution of Scottish teachers, 1984

Age	% of primary teachers	% of secondary teachers
30 and under	18.0	21.0
50-54	1.24	8.8
55-59	8.8	6.5
60+	2.5	2.2

Source: Scottish Education Department Bulletin 3/A4/1986

Secondly, the implications of declining school rolls and reductions in expenditure

have coincided with a major review of the objectives, methods of teaching and the techniques of assessment of pupils. It is questionable whether sufficient time and resources have been made available to enable teachers to generate the new associated coursework and to introduce these changes, given the climate of financial stringency in which local authorities have to operate. Furthermore, a common feature of these developments is their extensive record keeping and documentation. The new methods make substantial intrusions into teachers' non-contract hours, traditionally the time allowed for preparation and marking.

A third factor is the debate over curriculum content, which in fact is composed of two separate and potentially conflicting trends. On the one hand, there is a resurgence of educational philosophies which question the relevance of the content of secondary education to the current and future needs of industry. On the other, there is the apparent growing concern amongst parents to have a greater influence on curricula and other activities in schools. The difficulties arise not over the principle of increased parental involvement in the processes of education but on the criteria by which decisions are made. The present Government stresses a market analogy for teaching. In the oft mooted voucher system parents would be able to choose to send their children to a school which met their criteria as to curricula and discipline of pupils and which had a suitable or even impressive success rate measured by academic achievement. The current system of placement requests represents but an initial and imperfect substitute for such a voucher scheme. Similarly, proposals to give more choice and influence to parents are based on an assumption of the supremacy of parental knowledge over teachers as to educational needs.

There is a glaring paradox in these two debates. The education system is to meet the needs of society - to product a suitably qualified labour force - but it is too organised on the the criteria of individual advancement as defined by parents. Moreover, rising levels of

unemployment have prompted a questioning of the whole value of education by young people and has contributed to the difficulties facing teachers in motivating and stimulating them. It is difficult to speculate how schools are expected to meet these calls for market based choice, a more vocationally orientated pattern of education with emphasis on teaching the 'realities of the processes of wealth generation' and simultaneously be expected to absorb the additional work involved in dealing with the social issues and problems of multiple deprivation, break up of families, drug usage, and to follow the policies of caring for disabled and problem children in normal schools.

Recently education has risen once again in the political agenda. In this arena there is disagreement as to the balance between public and private sectors, and over the relative powers of Whitehall and local education authorities. The Prime Minister is said to favour a free market policy which would reduce the influence of teachers, trade unions and local authorities in favour of parents and would encourage the direct grant sector. The Treasury supports a policy of centralisation of control over teachers' pay and educational standards. The announcement of Sir Keith's retirement has prompted, within the Conservative administration, a struggle among traditionalists, the free market group and advocates of the industrial model. The last of these three envisages the creation of a new Department of Education and Training under Lord Young and represents a more radical redirection of education to meet the needs of industry. Behind the debate over the introduction of 'relevant skill training' into schools versus more traditional education may lie an attempt at social restructuring. Professor Simon in a recent book quotes a DES official who has written of the necessity to reintroduce selection

"because we are beginning to create aspirations which society cannot match..... If we have a highly educated and highly idle population we may possibly anticipate more serious social conflict. People must be educated once more to know their place."

Industrialising education

Government and employers are increasingly attempting to apply rigid industrial cost-accounting criteria to a profession whose members have traditionally tended to relate to their work in almost a 'pre-industrial' fashion. The main features of the latter pattern of work can be itemised as follows:

1. Work tasks are permeated by a sense of personal obligation and commitment, in addition to any monetary reward.
2. Tasks are defined by a perception of a generally agreed set of needs that children have rather than by a rigidly defined contract or job description.
3. There is no clear distinction between work (or school) time and home (or 'free') time.

Such an accepted perspective towards work has traditionally led teachers to expect and be prepared to do some of their work at home or to perform extra tasks at school, as part of the normal state of affairs. The current difficulties are the result of two parallel developments. First, the amount of extra-contractual work has increased dramatically. The introduction of new examination systems with no extra provision of resources has placed the job of creating, developing and testing new curricula firmly in the lap of teachers as a considerable additional burden to their existing workload and, with only marginal reductions in class contact time. The Scottish Joint National Council Working Party on Teachers' Workload concluded that "it is apparent that the bulk of this work is being tackled by teachers outwith the contractual working week". The same can be said of the new systems of pupil assessment and discipline, all of which involve considerably more administration than more traditional methods.

Whilst Government statistics indicate that there has been an improvement in the

pupil-teacher ratio, such statistics should be treated with some caution. Firstly, they imply that all teachers teach an equal amount. If an allowance is made for the normal non-teaching times of all promoted staff the ratio would be nearer to 15.9 than the current official secondary school ratio of 13.7 and would be even higher in core subjects. Secondly, staffing allowances underestimate the degree of non-teaching contact work.

The effect of an increasing workload coupled with a progressive erosion of teachers' pay has been to heighten the sense of demoralisation in the profession, and a feeling that teachers' traditional commitment has quite literally been exploited. This has led teachers to adopt a more conventional 'industrial' model of the wage - effort equation, and commence the series of 'working to contract' actions: refusal to cover for colleagues, to undertake development work, extra school activities and the whole range of voluntary work.

The second factor, developing on a collision course with the above, and boosted by teachers' actions, was that the Government, in an attempt to gain control over the utilisation of educational resources, increasingly sought to write in all such extra duties into the formal conditions of service, thus making any offer of increased pay conditional upon such revised conditions. There are only a limited number of ways in which such hitherto voluntary duties could be included into formal conditions of service:

1. By reducing class contact time. This, in the current economic climate, would be unlikely.
2. Increasing the length of the contractual working day and possibly lengthening the teaching year. Teachers would be required to spend time at school outwith the teaching terms to prepare materials.

To simply write extra duties into a contract would force teachers to choose between operating according to pupils' educational needs plus voluntary work outwith contractual hours, or recognising the economic criteria of their employers and making a sharp and rigid distinction between the time which belongs to their employers and that which belongs to them.

We have called this process the 'industrialisation of education' because it seems to consist of two interrelated processes. First, the intensification of the use of contractual time in such ways as have been described above and requiring greater 'managerial' control over teachers' labour process via specifically contracted duties and continuous assessment of teachers' performance. Secondly, the introduction of market forces into education wherever possible via the attempt to introduce supply and demand via voucher schemes, increased emphasis on parental demand - which it is assumed will result in an increased supply of 'good' teachers.

The net result of these developments will be to monetise a profession whose value to society and whose job content have traditionally been partially assessed in non-monetary terms. The likely consequences of this were spelled out some years ago by the late Professor Titmuss in an essay on the effects of payment to blood donors which thereby altered the hitherto voluntary relationship between donor and recipient. Studying the private market for blood in the USA, Titmuss concluded that the monetisation of such a relationship:

"represses the expression of altruism, erodes the sense of community, lowers standards, limits both personal and professional freedoms"

and by subjecting critical areas of medicine to the laws of the market place puts the heaviest burden on those at least able to bear them.

To translate this example into the field of education, many teachers would say that what Titmuss called the 'corruption of fellowship' has already begun. There is now a shortage of teachers in some areas, as many have judged that for the pay on offer, the job 'isn't worth it' and have left the profession. A calculative or diminished moral involvement changes the criteria for assessing the value of out of school work. The objective becomes more maximising of undertaking it for income for minimum effort rather than the good of the pupils. It therefore generates the need for ever more controls and sanctions. In this respect the introduction of more detailed contracts, which monetise the hitherto voluntary elements, may well generate the very behaviour patterns which the Government seeks to regulate.

To paraphrase Fox, our economic system continues to operate only because the economic exchange of the market doesn't completely dominate our economic system. There are crucial sectors of activity which can only be effectively undertaken on a high discretion basis which

"evokes a measure of personal involvement and diffuse mutual obligation on the part of those involved..... any attempt to substitute (a calculative) specificity for the relatively diffuse commitment among members of the high trust fraternity would soon bring the modern work organisation grinding to a halt".

The implications for education are clear. The Government has attempted to portray teachers' actions as a betrayal of professional standards to the detriment of childrens' interests. Both Titmuss and Fox indicate the dangers of establishing educational priorities on market criteria:

"to pursue social policies which extinguish the visible expression of fellowship reduces the probability of men perceiving that such sentiments are shared by others, thereby increasing their own difficulty in retaining these sentiments themselves".

In these circumstances there is the danger that education would offer the young the message that life is essentially characterised by minimal personal involvement and an essentially calculative perspective. Ironically this was the very criticism levelled by the Government at the recent teachers' action.

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